

"The Closest Thing to the Irreplaceable Man"

President, Other Government Officials Praise Bob Ames at Symposium and Dinner on Campus

By Robert S. Lyons, Jr., '61



William J. Casey delivers keynote address at memorial dinner in honor of Bob Ames.

Appearances by CIA Director William J. Casey and Richard Helms, the former director of Central Intelligence, highlighted a memorial symposium and dinner in honor of Robert C. Ames, '56, on La Salle's campus, December 11.

The symposium, which was devoted to "A Survey of Themes in the Middle East," was held during that day in the Dan Rodden Theatre. It featured presentations by a number of former friends and colleagues of Ames who was serving as director of the CIA's Office of Analysis for the Near East and South Asia when he was murdered in the bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon in 1983.

Ames, a member of La Salle's 1953-54 NCAA Championship bas-



Richard Helms

ketball team, was honored at a memorial dinner following the symposium in the La Salle Union Ballroom. At that time, La Salle's Brother President Patrick Ellis, F.S.C., Ph.D., posthumously bestowed the university's President's Medal upon Ames and a plaque was dedicated in his memory. Ames' mother, Helen, his widow, Yvonne, and their six children were present for the ceremonies.

Casey, the keynote speaker at the dinner, arrived at La Salle's campus after spending the day in Washington testifying before the House Intelligence Committee investigating the controversial arms sale to Iran. It turned out to be Casey's last public appearance before suffering a stroke and subsequent brain

tumor that led to his resignation of the CIA directorship.

Recalling Ames "as about the closest thing to the irreplaceable man because he not only had great knowledge but exceptional poise and an authoritative presence," Casey read letters from "two of the strongest and most fervent friends and admirers of Bob Ames," President Ronald Reagan and Secretary of State George P. Shultz.

The President congratulated La Salle University officials for paying tribute to the memory of a "truly superior public servant." Then, noting the complexity of the world situation, he added, "To know the Middle East as well as Bob did, and to give proper and eloquent advice

provided major support to President Carter during the Camp David peace process, and to President Reagan in our efforts to pick up the pieces from Lebanon and fashion a peace accord in that region."

Casey added that Ames "had perhaps the keenest insights into the Arab mind of any individual in government." He recalled how Bob was "just as comfortable sitting cross-legged in the Arabian desert with Bedouin Shaykhs as he was in the White House briefing Presidents."

Helms, the former U.S. Ambassador to Iran, discussed "The Craft of Intelligence" at the day-long symposium. He described how Ames once wrote a paper to give a

Arab-Israeli Peace Process" at the symposium and spent considerable time explaining the role played by Ames in attempting to bring some stability to the Middle East. Quandt said that the Middle East peace process has simply "not been one of our highest priorities" and since 1979 has become much more of a slogan than a reality.

"Only once," Quandt said, "did we really seriously try to energize the peace process, and it came after another tragedy—the disastrous war in Lebanon in the summer of 1982. Out of that fiasco there was a widespread realization that something had to be done to re-establish American credibility and leadership if our own national interests were not to suffer."



Shireen Hunter



William Quandt



Graham Fuller

to those of us who relied so much upon him, required a rare kind of wisdom.

"La Salle's motto, I am told, is 'Virtue and Knowledge'. In both the ability and dedication of Bob Ames, I cannot imagine any better fulfillment of that motto."

Shultz, in his letter, explained how much he valued Ames' expertise on many subjects, particularly on how Arabs think, feel, and react. The Secretary of State described how Bob's experience had given him a special appreciation of the relationship between policy, diplomacy, and intelligence.

"This appreciation and Bob's individual talents allowed him to serve two administrations as a senior advisor," Shultz added. "He

young associate a feel of the Middle East where he just had been assigned.

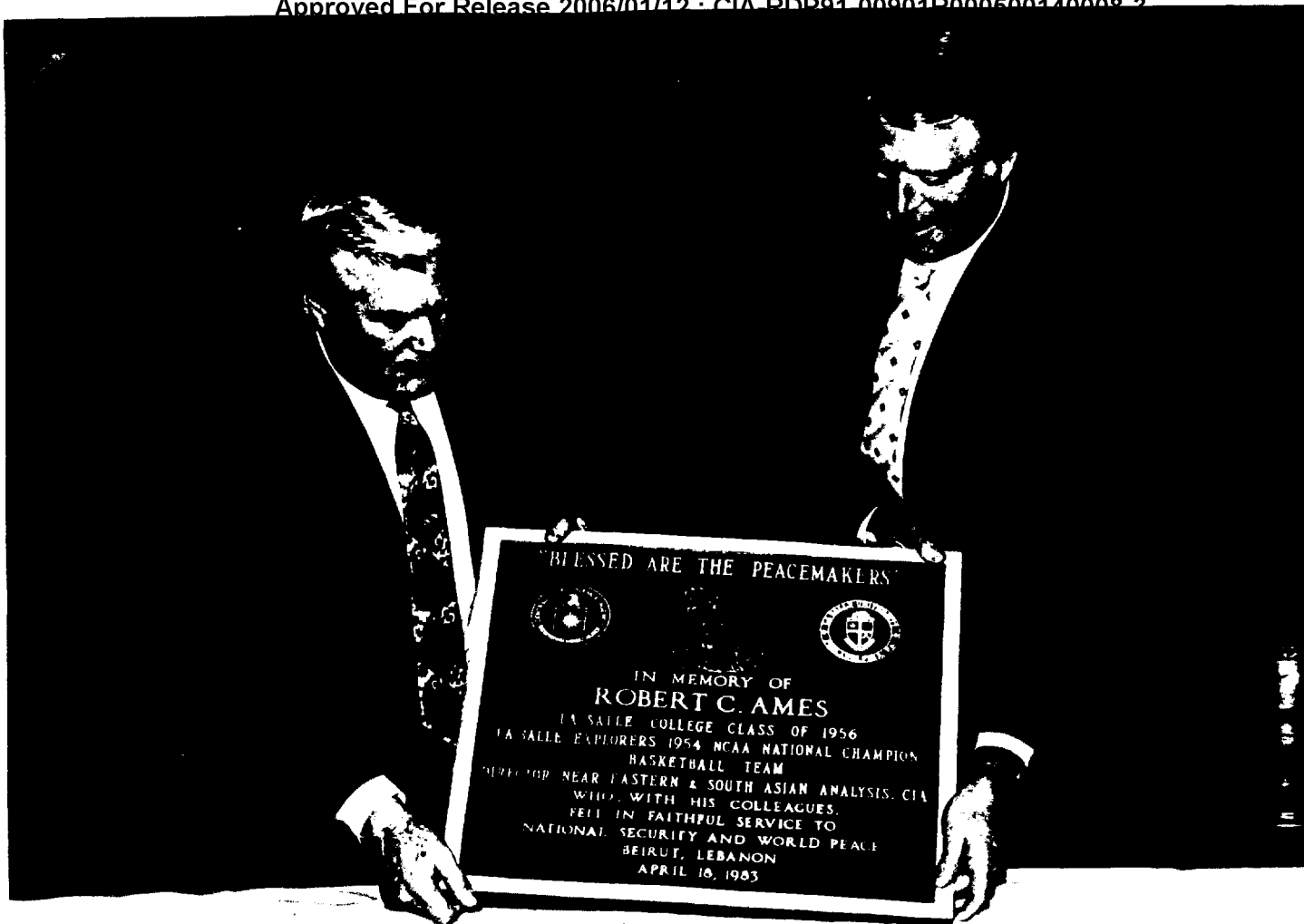
"It was a labor of love on Bob's part because he was under no obligation to indoctrinate his inexperienced colleague," Helms recalled. "But he was fully aware of the so-called culture shock which hits Americans as they learn about the Arab world. And he wanted to get this young man off on the right foot. I hope it leaves with you today the thought that it's a wide world out there. There are many cultures in it and it behooves us to learn more about them."

William Quandt, a former National Security Council member who is now a senior fellow with The Brookings Institute, described "The

When Secretary of State Shultz came into office with a "professed desire to take the pressure off the Middle East situation," he surrounded himself, not with people from "conventional parts of the bureaucracy," but he reached out where he thought he could find the best advice. Some of those individuals, like Henry Kissinger, came from outside government. So did Bob Ames although he would not normally have been included in the policy deliberations of the State Department because of his position at the CIA.

"But Bob had a reputation for clear thinking, experience, and good judgment," recalled Quandt, qualities that were desperately needed in that very sensitive per-

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Henry G. DeVincent, M.D., '56 (left), an orthopedic surgeon and a trustee of the university, and former La Salle All America Tom Gola, '55, unveil plaque in honor of Bob Ames at the memorial dinner.

iod, late summer of 1982, to think about what could be done to get the United States out ahead of the mess in Beirut and to get us identified again with the movement toward peace. Out of these discussions came the decision that the President should make what has turned out so far to be his only major speech on the Arab-Israeli conflict. A speech that basically tried to put the United States back in a position of leadership at a time of great turmoil in the Middle East.

"On September 1, 1982 the President gave what I consider to be an extremely balanced, sensible speech," said Quandt. "No one will agree with every sentence in it. But as a statement of American principle, commitment to peace, a re-

iteration of the need to move toward peace through negotiations based on the underlying principles embodied in UN Resolution 242, it was a fine statement. And one can see the craftsmanship that Bob Ames had helped to bring to that—a sense of balance that someone earlier had said, 'this was not a man who had any animus toward any of the parties in the Middle East.' He was the epitome of fair-mindedness and even-handedness."

Quandt recalled that he saw Ames frequently during this period. "I was surprised to see how optimistic Bob was about the prospects for getting the peace process started," he said. "I was still stunned by the whole disaster in Lebanon and was quite pessimistic

about where that would leave us in the Middle East given a sense of widespread belief in the Arab world about collusion in the war in Lebanon with Israel. Bob had a remarkable streak of idealism in him—a belief that things need not always end in disaster."

Although he senses a "great deal of hopefulness" on the part of Bob Ames, Quandt explained that the Reagan initiative of September 1982 remained little more than a fine speech. "There was no strategy to follow through," he recalled. "The events threw us off course. Lebanon, instead of being on its way toward healing, in fact was just on the verge of a more tragic turn toward violence. And as the situation in Lebanon deteriorated, we

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found it difficult to maintain momentum behind a move toward peace."

Then in April, 1983 came the bombing of the Embassy and the death of Bob Ames. "I think we also lost an individual who might have tried to help guide the efforts in the continuing search for peace in the Middle East," added Quandt.

Shireen Hunter, a former Iranian diplomat who is now a senior fellow at the Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies, discussed "The Iran-Iraq War and its Implications for U.S. Interests." Recalling Ames, she said, "In the short period of time I got to know him I was highly impressed by his clarity of mind, but most importantly the objective and unemotional way he approached the Middle East which is a highly-charged and emotional place."

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"I was a colleague and friend of Bob Ames for many years," said Graham Fuller, vice chairman of the National Intelligence Council during his presentation. "I had immense respect for him. I was terribly impressed with his ability to deal with an extraordinary variety of people and types from the Middle East and was equally at home with all of them. I think he came to enjoy their respect and trust. That's a difficult trick. Bob did it very well."

Fuller discussed "The Soviet Union in the Middle East" during the symposium. Other Middle Eastern experts and policy-makers who participated were Harold Saunders, former assistant secretary of state for the Near East and South Asia who is now a senior fellow at The American Enterprise Institute ("U.S. Policy in the Middle East Since Camp David"); Robert Hunt-

er, a former National Security Council member who is now a senior fellow at the Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies ("Europe and the Middle East"); Daniel Pipes, former professor of strategy at The Naval War College who is now director of the Foreign Policy Research Institute ("Syria as the Pivot for State-Sponsored Terrorism in the Middle East"), and David Long, of the Office of Counter Terrorism, U.S. Department of State ("The Concept of Terrorism").

The event was sponsored by La Salle's Alumni Office and Political Science Department. Edward A. Turzanski, '81, the university's associate director of alumni, was the symposium director. Frank Blatcher, '56, a teammate, classmate, and close friend of Ames, was toastmaster at the dinner.

A Colleague Remembers:

A Terribly Energetic Person with Fond Memories of La Salle

Among the friends and colleagues of Ames who spent the day on campus was Martha Kessler who worked with Bob in the office of the National Intelligence Council in a policy support role during the Carter and Reagan administrations. In an interview before the dinner, she reminisced about their work as a team, his memories of La Salle, and hopes for the future. (Bob was killed just one year before he would have been eligible to retire.) Her thoughts:

"He was a terribly energetic person, always doing five times as much as anyone else. He was a very unique person within the agency in that he had a way of being able to deal with all sorts of people extremely well. Virtually everyone who worked with him, for him, or for whom he worked had a great deal of respect for his competence in the area, his dedication to public service, his straightforwardness. He would not equivocate on issues. If he did not know or did not have an answer well enough thought out, he would tell you. He was confident enough to do that so he elicited an enormous amount of respect."

Ames often talked about his days at La Salle.

"Bob obviously had very fond, warm memories of his four years here. He did tell me at one point that

he learned to operate under a lot of stress and had gained a lot of poise as an athlete. I think that experience helped him a great deal in his career. He wasn't intimidated by stressful situations which many young people are when they go into our profession. I think he had an enormous amount of poise which allowed him to feel very comfortable in a foreign culture, very comfortable in the Oval Office, very comfortable giving sworn testimony in front of Congressional Committees. That's an enormous asset. And I think that he probably gained a lot of that here at La Salle.

"I think that Bob had the sense that he had come to a certain mastery of his profession and probably would have enjoyed another challenge. (But) I always had the feeling that if the director of the agency or some other high level official in the U.S. Government asked him to take a special job, he would have done so because he was a very dedicated public servant. There was certain versatility to his talents. It wasn't just that he was a 'Middle East expert,' whatever. There was a sense that he was a very good manager, that he was an extremely articulate person, that he could grasp a problem quickly. He was an idea man."